



DELAINE EASTIN
State Superintendent of Public Instruction



September 1, 2000

To: Selected District Superintendents
Selected Charter School Principals

From: William L. Padia, Director
Policy and Evaluation Division

Subject: **The 2000 Academic Performance Index (API) and
Student Population Changes**

Data accuracy and comparability are key to the statewide accountability system. On August 30, we notified you of the opportunity to make changes in the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) 2000 data that impacts the accuracy of the 2000 Academic Performance Index (API) and the school rankings. **The purpose of this memorandum is to offer you the opportunity to clarify unusually high rates of change in student population as well as to notify us of student population changes that in your professional judgment would affect the comparability of a school's 1999 and 2000 Academic Performance Indexes.**

Listing Available through Internet

In determining which schools may have experienced significant changes, please review the *2000 API School Population Change Report*, available to you via the Internet at: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/psaa/api/change>. The Internet listing includes all schools for which we calculated a 1999 API and shows change data for the following four data elements:

1. Percentage of English language learners
2. Percentage of pupils participating in the school lunch program
3. Percentage of pupils participating in the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program
4. Percentage of pupils receiving special educational services and participating in the STAR program with either standard accommodations or no accommodations whatever

Unusually high rates of change are flagged with a "#." Districts and charter schools with flagged rates of change must respond to this memorandum, even if in your judgment these changes did not impact the APIs of these schools.

API Growth Data

As you are no doubt aware, the calculation of annual changes in a school's API is central to the accountability system, determining whether a school is eligible for the awards or interventions programs. API growth or decline in turn is the product of two factors:

- Changes in student achievement levels
- Changes in the composition of the student population at a school

The fundamental assumption is that the growth or decline in a school's API should reflect changes in actual achievement levels of similar students from year to year. Changes in achievement as a result of significant population differences from year to year are not accurate measures of comparable school change.

Examples of Population Change

Examples of the type of population change that could significantly impact a school's API include:

1. The opening or closing of a GATE magnet program on a school site
2. The opening or closing of a special education center at a school site
3. A significant change (either increase or decrease) in the number of pupils at the school who participate in the free or reduced price lunch program at a school site
4. A significant change (either increase or decrease) in the number of English language learners at a school site
5. Boundary changes or grade level configuration changes that significantly impact the composition of the school population

If any of these or similar changes occurred at schools that you administered during the 1999-2000 school year, they may have had a material impact on the test results at these schools. This in turn would have affected a school's 2000 Growth API and whether or not a school would meet its 1999-2000 API growth target.

In considering this, please remember that a school's API includes only the test results of students who are enrolled in the district for at least a year. In the case of students participating in special education programs, their test results are not included in the API if they took the test with non-standard accommodations.

Notification to the California Department of Education

You should respond to this letter:

- If any of your schools have rates of change that are flagged on the *2000 API School Population Change Report*, even if these changes in your judgment did not significantly impact the API at these schools
- If any of your schools received an API for 1999 and in your professional judgment should not receive a growth API for 2000 because of programmatic or demographic changes that occurred in the 1999-2000 school year

To respond, you should first notify us via e-mail by **September 12, 2000** and follow this up in writing not later than **September 19, 2000**. **If none of your schools have flagged data or experienced significant population changes, no response is necessary.**

Notifications should go to the following addresses:

E-mail messages: epic@cde.ca.gov

Written notification
by surface mail: California Department of Education
Educational Planning and Information Center
721 Capitol Mall, 4th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814
Attn: Pat McCabe

If you have schools with flagged data but the changes in student population did not impact their APIs:

You should include in your e-mail and written notifications the names of the schools affected, the county-district-school codes of the schools, along with a statement that in your judgment these changes did not significantly impact the schools' APIs. If you believe that the population changes reflected in the report are simply the result of erroneous data, please inform us of the data elements that you believe to be in error. You or your authorized representative must sign the follow-up notification that is mailed to the CDE.

Until we have heard from you, we will not report 2000 Growth APIs for any of your schools with flagged data. **Please note that to be eligible for the second cohort of schools participating in the interventions program or selected for one of the upcoming awards programs, a school must have a 2000 Growth API.** Therefore, your failure to respond has the effect of making a school ineligible for either program.

If you have schools with changes, whether flagged or not, that significantly impacted their APIs:

You should include in your e-mail and written notifications the names of the schools affected, the county-district-school codes of the schools, as well as the **specific programmatic or demographic changes** at the schools that in your judgment would invalidate a 2000 Growth API. Also, you should include a statement that the remainder of schools in your district did not have population changes that would have significantly impacted their APIs. You or your authorized representative must sign the written follow-up notification that is mailed to the CDE.

Significant population changes are not necessarily restricted to the four summarized on the Internet report. If there are other programmatic or demographic changes that you believe invalidated a school's API, please include these with your notification. Once you have notified us of any instances of significant population changes, we will not report the 2000 Growth APIs for those schools in the *1999-2000 Academic Performance Index (API) Growth Report* in late September 2000. However, we will calculate a new base year 2000 API, state rank, similar schools rank, and 2001 growth target in January 2001.

Please note that to be eligible for the second cohort of schools participating in the interventions program or for the upcoming awards programs, a school must have a 2000 Growth API. Therefore, your notification that population changes would invalidate a school's 2000 Growth API has the effect of making that school ineligible for these programs.

Conclusion

An effective accountability system ultimately depends on public confidence that the data supporting the system are accurate and enable fair comparisons from one year to another. Because of the high-stakes nature of the system, we must expect that any of our decisions or actions will be subject to intense public scrutiny. Therefore, I urge you to consider carefully the question of the magnitude of population changes at a particular school and their impact on a school's API before you notify us. If you have any questions about this process or about the programmatic and demographic data displayed on the Internet site, please call the Educational Planning and Information Center at (916) 657-2273.